

First Meeting of Arab HDTV Group **Tunis 21-22 November 2007**

In accordance with the ASBU General Assembly decisions, the first Arab HDTV Group Meeting was held at the ASBU H.Q. in Tunis, 21-22 November 2007.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Broadcast Organizations from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Oman, Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. The meeting was also attended by representatives from Arabsat, ASBU General Directorate, ASBU Exchange Centre, ASBU Training Centre, EBU, Thomson Sony, Harris, All Systems International, Harmonic and Glocom.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Salah Eddine Maaoui, ASBU Director General and chaired by Dr. Riyadh Najm, Assistant Deputy Minister for Engineering, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Najm, the Group Chair, made a presentation that covered the following main HDTV aspects:

- HDTV and its introduction worldwide (Europe, USA and Asia)
- Arab HDTV Group tasks and bylaws
- Guiding principles for HDTV potential users in the Arab Region.

This presentation was followed by three working sessions that covered the following topics:

First Session

HDTV production standards with presentations made by Thomson, Harris and Sony.

Second Session

HDTV transmission and compression standards with presentations made by Harmonic and Thomson.

Third Session

The Roadmap for introduction of HDTV in the Arab Region, ASBU HDTV work plan, Arabsat HDTV proposal and the ASBU General Assembly decision to establish the Arab HDTV Group.

The Group then had extensive discussions of all matters related to its tasks, objectives and working procedures and reached the following conclusions :

1. HDTV Format

The Group has adopted the progressive scan as the HDTV format to be used for HDTV production in the Arab Region. The 720p format to be used now with future migration to 1080p.

2. HDTV Delivery Format

The Group believes that the choice of best HDTV delivery format will depend on two major factors:

- technical advantages of the delivery format
- the economical advantages for each format and its medium and long terms STBs availability for the viewers.

Technically, the group is of the view that the progressive scan will provide a better picture quality compared to the interlace scan (free from the interlace artefacts) and will provide as well a 20% bandwidth saving compared to the interlace scan. Accordingly, the Group identified the progressive scan as the better format on technical basis.

As for the economical advantages, the Group stated that the available information on prices is not sufficient to enable carrying the proper evaluation. The Group needs to know the final prices to be paid by the consumer for HDTV receivers for each format.

To this end, the Group asked the Secretariat to request from the receiver manufacturers to provide their HDTV receiver prices for each format. The Group believes that if the information collected will indicate that there are no noticeable differences in receiver prices, then the Group will recommend the adoption of the progressive scan as the HDTV delivery format in the Arab Region.

3. HDTV Transmission Compression Systems

All studies carried to date to evaluate the HDTV transmission compression systems had identified that MPEG-4 AVC (ITU-H264) is the best system used technically and economically and is now used worldwide. The receivers using now this system are backward compatible and can receive as well the conventional SD signals. For the audio transmission and compression the Group indicated the need to study both Dolby and MPEG-4 AAC systems and their availability in the consumer receivers. The Group asked its members to further study both systems and exchange information and views about them until a decision is taken. The Group asked its Secretariat to contact the HDTV receiver manufacturers to provide the necessary information related to the format used in their HDTV receivers and the impact this has on its price.

4. Programme Exchange and Studio Compression Systems

The Group noted that the ASBU Working Group (C) on Radio and TV Production is entrusted to study and evaluate studio compression systems. The Group has asked Eng. Hassan Al Mahami from Morocco to be the contact person with the ASBU Working Group (C) and report its recommendations to the Arab HDTV Group.

5. The HDTV Roadmap in the Arab Region

The Group stressed the importance of selecting the proper transmission system, timetable and other important related matters needed for the introduction of HDTV in the Arab Region.

The Group formed a Working Group chaired by Eng. Mohsen Ghamam from ONT Tunis with the following members:

- Mrs. Houria Khethir ENTV Algiers
- Eng. Khaled Ammori JRTV Jordan
- Eng. Mustafa Hamouda Abu-Dhabi TV

The Working Group is to devise a strategic plan to introduce HDTV in the Arab Region taking into account all aspects of feasibility and economy for both the broadcaster and the viewer.

6. HDTV System Promotion

6.1 The Group discussed the best way to promote HDTV service in the Arab Region and inform the Arab viewers of the advantages of this service. To this end, the Group entrusted its Secretariat to:

- prepare a TV spot, in collaboration with the members and interested parties, and arrange the broadcast of this HDTV spot and make it available through exchanging it via the ASBU Satellite Channels and all available distribution systems;
- prepare an HDTV Arabic Leaflet describing HDTV, its worldwide use and the technical and economical advantages related to this system. This leaflet is to be made available to all stakeholders in the region.

The members could use this HDTV material to produce Radio and TV Spots to inform the viewers in their respective countries about HDTV, its advantages and how to implement it, taking advantage of the various HDTV directives adopted by the Arab HDTV Group.

6.2 The Group Secretariat has been asked to inform all TV terrestrial and satellite channels about the Arab HDTV Group, objectives and working procedures and invite them to join the Group to benefit from the Group discussions and recommendations related to the complete HDTV production, transmission and reception chains.

6.3 The Group Chair was entrusted to publish a Press Release declaring its establishment, tasks, objectives, working procedures and membership.

6.4 The Group Secretariat was asked to inform all related HDTV equipment manufacturers (production, transmission and reception) about the Group activities and invite them to join the Group and participate in its work, as this will help their activities in the region to benefit positively.

7. HDTV Receivers

The Group asked the concerned parties in the Arab Region to ensure that the HDTV receivers are capable of using both free-to-air and conditional access Pay TV Systems. The Group further asked for the adoption of this specification in the HDTV receivers and published a Press Release in this regard.

8. SD Television Archives

The Group is of the view that there is no need to transfer the existing SD archives to HDTV and this is to be done only when needed.

The Group stressed the importance for the members to continue developing the preservation of their archives in accordance with their available plans and in a way that will allow smooth access to those archives

9. HDTV Training

The Group discussed technical and programme training for the HDTV production and transmission using 16:9 aspect ratio and stressed the need to train all technical and production teams nationally and regionally. The Group asked the ASBU Training center to conduct training courses on HDTV covering all technical and programme aspects. The Group further stressed the need to cooperate and benefit from other training centres, broadcasting unions, related companies and manufacturers, to train technical and programme TV production personnel in all HDTV related aspects. The Group has asked that those HDTV training courses organized by ASBU Training Center be available to members and non-members and in accordance with the its adopted procedures.

10. Arab HDTV Group Bylaws and Working Procedures

10.1 Group Working Procedures

The Group will mainly conduct its business by e-mail and it will hold one annual meeting. The date and place of the meeting will be decided by the Group Chair and its Secretariat.

10.2 Group Secretariat

ASBU will take care of the Group Secretariat.

10.3 Group Membership

- ASBU members
- Other TV Channels and Networks in the Arab Region
- International HDTV Channels from outside the Region (as observers)
- World Broadcasting Unions
- HDTV Transmission Equipment Manufacturers
- HDTV Production Equipment Manufacturers
- HDTV Receiver Manufacturers
- Arabsat and Nilesat
- Related International and Regional Organizations.

Each member will be asked to nominate one or two representatives to follow the Group activities and participate in its meetings. The Group Secretariat (ASBU) should be notified by the coordinates (e-mail, phone, address) of each member representative(s).

10.4 Registered Member

The TV channel or Network, Organization, or company that expresses its interest to be a member, should nominate its representative(s) and provide his/her/their coordinate(s) to the Group Secretariat.

10.5 Level of Membership

All the members (except observers) have the same level of rights and obligations including voting.

10.6 Chairmanship

The Group will elect from its members one Chair and two Vice-Chairs, for a maximum of two terms. The duration of each term is three years.

10.7 Working Language

As the Group membership is open to international members, the working language is English. The Group will issue, as well, its output documents in Arabic.

10.8 Income and Membership Fees

The membership is free for the broadcasters and participating organizations. The manufacturers shall pay an annual fee of 5000 Euro. The Group may invite as well sponsors to support certain Group activities.

10.9 Recommendations

The Group Members are advised to apply all recommendations issued by the Group when implementing HDTV in the Arab Region. Manufacturers who are members of the Group shall not promote opposing recommendations to the Group members.

10.10 Voting Power

The Group recommendations are to be passed by consensus. If there is no consensus, the recommendation is valid if a two-third majority support it. Each member has one vote. If an issue requires approval, the members shall send their response within two weeks from the date issuing the request. No answer within that period is considered as consent.

10.11 The Group meeting shall be valid if more than half of the registered members are present.

11. Election of the Group Chair and Vice Chairs

The Group elected Dr. Riyadh Najm from Saudi Arabia as a Chair and Mr. Mohammed Marhoubi from Oman as the first Vice-Chair and a representative from EBU as the second Vice-Chair. They will serve for a three year term as of 1/1/2008.